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ABSTRACT

This booklet introduces elementary school teachers to the methodology, climate, aims, and objectives necessary for the teaching of philosophical thinking to grade schoolers. The methodology casts the teacher as a facilitator whose primary task is stimulating children to reason about their own problems. The discussion process with hints and guides for the teacher is emphasized. Through the process the teacher tries to bring children to perceive the points of view of others and to give reasons for their own opinions. Prerequisite conditions that the teacher needs to establish for fruitful discussion include avoidance of indoctrination, respect for children's opinions, and evocation of children's trust. Among the aims for the teaching of philosophical thinking are improvement of reasonging ability, development of creativity, and personal development. Another goal that makes philosophical thinking a conscience activity is discovering the tools of philosophical thinking -- alternatives, impartiality, consistency, reasons for beliefs, comprehensiveness, and contextual factors. "Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery" (SO 008 127) is the children's story to be used as a springboard for philosophical discussion. A teacher's manual is forthcoming. (JH)

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TEACHING CHILDREN PHILOSOPHICAL THINKING

by

Matthew Lipman and Ann Ma

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Teacher's Manual

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00003

The program that follows is for use with *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*. The basic method and concepts of the program are derived from the subject of philosophy, which until recently had been taught only in colleges and universities. Philosophical thinking, however, can be encouraged and developed among children of virtually any age. And any qualified elementary school teacher has the potential to encourage philosophical thinking among children.

Of course, to *encourage* children to think philosophically is not the same as *teaching* them to think. No one can actually *teach* another person to think. But in an environment that is favorable to thinking, thinking is more likely to happen than in an unfavorable environment. In a classroom where children feel encouraged by the teacher to think for themselves, they often do respond by thinking for themselves. The teacher may not be able to teach thinking itself, but the teacher can work to create an environment in which the child can develop the courage to discuss, to reason, to reflect, to express himself, to compare and contrast his views with those of other children—in short, to try out his intellectual wings. And as birds learn to fly by flying, one learns to think by thinking.

FORMAT OF THIS MANUAL

You will notice that the manual is divided into a series of episodes which correspond to episodes in the children's book, *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*. For each episode the manual indicates:

1. *The Leading Ideas* in that episode.

2. *Talks to Teachers:* A discussion of underlying issues and concepts that it may be useful to know for guidance of the classroom dialogues.

3. *Logical Background:* In some cases, the text may present certain issues which presuppose a limited knowledge of logic. A greater explanation of these issues is therefore provided when necessary. As with the material in *Talks to Teachers* just mentioned, these explanations are not primarily for classroom teaching purposes, but are meant to enlighten the teacher in the event that pupils should inquire about these issues in any depth.

4. *Teacher's Own Notes:* Since all philosophical issues lend themselves to diverse interpretations, even the material in *Talks to Teachers* is simply interpretation. Each page of the manual, therefore, provides space for the teacher's comments and possible cues for the classroom discussion. In this way, the teacher has available on each page of the manual, the passage under discussion from the children's

00004

book, the editors' interpretation of underlying issues and the teacher's own notes.

5. *Suggested Activities:* It is important that, in this first encounter with philosophy, children learn that philosophical ways of thinking do not just remain "intellectual," but can be translated into many different forms of work and play. In other words, it is important that children experience the connection between the ideas that they learn and the conduct they engage in. Conversely, it is important that they become aware of ideas which may be generated by their work or play activities. It will be noticed that activities do not stress the cognitive element alone, but are equally concerned with the development of the child's creative imagination, and social relationships. Activities therefore include games, puzzles, artistic creation or performance, thinking exercises, performance of logical operations, and so on.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of the teaching of *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery* is consistent with the discovery approach exemplified by the book. In no way is the teacher an authority figure in the sense that his views must be considered the right ones. The teacher should rather be viewed as a facilitator whose primary task is in stimulating children to reason about their own problems through classroom discussions.

It would be very unfortunate if the teacher in this program were to feel that there is a specific amount of content which must be covered every day, extracted from each episode, and eventually memorized by the students. On the contrary, a successful class is one in which the students enter into an excited, animated, enthusiastic discussion about something or other in the book. Such discussions are capable of creating lasting impressions on children.

The amount of information or knowledge a child has acquired is less essential to his education than the development of his intellectual judgment. It is less important that a child remember certain data than that he think effectively. It is here that "every difference makes a difference." That is, any difference, not matter how slight, in the child's mode of thinking, can conceivably modify his entire thought process. For example, a child may, until this year, have been operating on the assumption that things are pretty much what they seem to be, and suddenly he discovers that maybe they are not. That one discovery can change his whole life.

Since the stress is on the *process* of discussion, and is not aimed at achieving any particular conclusion, the teacher does not need to

00005

present herself to the children as possessing a great store of information. The teacher instead appears to the class as simply a questioner who is interested in stimulating and facilitating the discussion among the children. She does not claim to be infallibly right or wrong. But she may very well express interest in differences among points of view, or in confirmations or contradictions of particular opinions. It has been observed that in this atmosphere of intellectual give and take, students who had hitherto been withdrawn or reserved begin to put forth their opinions because they realize that, in such an atmosphere, any point of view has to be respected as any other, and they are willing to take their chances with the ensuing discussion.

Although one doesn't *teach* philosophy to children, it is possible to elicit from them the wondering and questioning which are characteristic of philosophical behaviour at any age. Gradually the children in the classroom begin to discover that a philisophical discussion has a different style from any other type of discussion. It is not just a matter of getting things off their chests, or being able to indulge in self-expression. They begin to realize that they are able to compare notes, experiences and perspectives with one another. Gradually, they perceive the pieces beginning to fit together into an objective picture of the way things might be. They begin to understand the importance of recognizing other people's points of view, and of giving reasons for their own opinions. Out of this, there emerges a sense of the value of impartiality, and a need to think problems through rather than be satisfied with superficial or glib expressions of opinion.

Although the classroom program may include such rigorous aspects of philosophy as the principles of logic, teachers need not be perturbed if the discussion goes off in any direction the children care to take it, although, of course, the teacher must exercise judgment as to the relevancy of the discussion and as to whether the length of time devoted to any particular discussion is or is not disproportionate. Moreover, there is a difference between a "bull session" and a philosophical discussion. A philosophical discussion is *cumulative*; it grows or develops, and through it the participants discover endlessly new horizons. The art of the teacher, therefore, consists in artfully eliciting comments from the children in such a was as to keep the discussion building, while yet involving the greatest possible participation from the class. The role of the teacher throughout the discussion is one of a talented questioner. With an eye to encouraging convergent lines of discussion, with a recognition that the dialogue is often openended and unstructured, the

00006

teacher will recognize opportunities for the children to explore new vistas, just as there will be opportunities to indicate how ideas reenforce previous experiences.

Under suitable circumstances, a room full of children will pounce on an idea thrown at them in the way a litter of kittens will pounce on a ball of wool thrown in their direction. The children will kick the idea around until it has been developed, elaborated upon, and even in some instances applied to life situations, although this latter is seldom achieved without the teacher's artful guidance. Yet, when the discussion hour is finished, they may make such remarks as "Time to get back to our school work," as if what they had been doing all along wasn't school or learning or discovery of their own intellectual prowess! They may take philosophy to be nothing more than fun and games, not realizing that it may be as intellectually formative as anything they might encounter in their school experience.

WHAT IS A DISCUSSION?

A thoughtful discussion is no easy achievement. It takes practice. It requires the development of habits, of listening and reflecting. It means that those who express themselves during a discussion must try to organize their thoughts before they speak out so as not to ramble on pointlessly. Very young children may either wish to talk all at once or not talk at all. It takes a long time for them to learn the procedure that a good discussion requires.

One of the reasons that the process of discussion is so difficult for children to learn is that they are so frequently lacking in models of good discussion with which they can identify. If neither the home nor the school offers them examples of thoughtful discussion—whether of adults with children or of children with children, or even of adults with adults— then each generation of children must in effect invent the whole process of discussion by itself, because no one ever shows it how. In short, there has to be an established tradition of discussion which each child can automatically assimilate and identify with and engage in if a really viable educational process is to be developed.

One of the merits of *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery* is that it offers a model of dialogue - both of children with one another, and of children with adults. It is a model that is non-authoritarian, anti-indoctrinational, respects the values of inquiry and reasoning, encourages the development of alternative modes of thought and imagination, and sketches out what it might be like to live and participate in a small community where children have their own interests and yet respect each

00007

other as people, and are capable at times of engaging in cooperative inquiry for no other reason than that it seems satisfying to do so.

Perhaps one of the most distinctive features of the model is that it suggests how children are able to learn from one another. This is a problem that is encountered today at every level of education: there are students in colleges, secondary schools and elementary schools who try to "make it on their own" without really seeking to learn from one another or to assimilate the life experience of their peers even when, through discussion, it might be readily available to them.

While some children participate readily enough but fail to listen to one another, others listen intently, follow the line of the discussion and may then respond to it by making a contribution which goes beyond, rather than merely repeats what has been said. The teacher should, of course, be aware of the possibilities that the child who doesn't always listen may be developing a very unusual set of ideas and needs to disregard the conversation for a while in order to do so. The harm he does to himself by not listening is therefore likely to be considerably less than the harm another child does to himself who, by not listening, is constantly forced to cover the same ground that others have already gone over.

A discussion should build via its own dynamics. Like children in a playground building a pyramid by standing on one another, a discussion builds upon the contributions of each of its members. In asking questions, the teacher is not merely trying to elicit answers that are already known. Encouraging philosophical thinking is a matter of getting children to reflect in fresh ways, to consider alternative methods of thinking and acting, to deliberate creatively and imaginatively. The teacher cannot possibly know in advance the answers that children are going to come up with. In fact, it is just this element of *surprise* which has always been so refreshing about teaching philosophical thinking: one never is quite sure what thought will surface next.

It is, of course, important to keep the discussion going. As the children hear each other's experiences and begin to learn from each other, they will begin to appreciate one another's point of view and to respect one another's values. But when it appears that the discussion of one of the leading ideas of the episodes has ceased to be productive, the teacher must be prepared to direct the discussion tactfully to another topic.

00008

PREREQUISITES FOR TEACHING PHILOSOPHICAL THINKING

Children are not likely to engage productively in philosophical discussion unless these indispensable conditions obtain:

1. Avoidance of Indoctrination
2. Respect for Children's Opinions
3. Evocation of Children's Trust

The goal of any kind of education is the liberation of the student from unquestioning belief in doctrines that have been forced upon him, in order that he may be able to develop the ability to think for himself, discover his own orientation to the world and devise his own set of beliefs about it. We cannot expect children to respect themselves as persons unless they have learned to utilize fully the intellectual powers with which they are equipped. Every child should be encouraged to develop and articulate his own way of looking at things. Different children have different values. But if they hold these values thoughtfully, if they have given consideration to why they feel and think the way they do, if they have given some reflection to their needs and interests and activities, this will be an indication that their philosophical discussions have been helpful for them. It doesn't particularly matter that they all turn out to have different ways of looking at things. It doesn't particularly matter that they disagree with one another or with the teacher on philosophical issues. All that matters is that they get a better understanding of what they think and why they think and feel and act the way they do, and of how it might be to reason really effectively.

A course in philosophical thinking, whether for children or for adults, can never be guilty of serving as a means for implanting the teacher's values in the uncritical minds of the children in the classroom. It doesn't matter that the teacher is confident his values are the "correct" ones: if this is what he is doing, it is equivalent to brainwashing.

On the other hand, there are teachers who feel they must be very careful not to reveal any values of their own in their teaching. They believe that their method of teaching is and must remain "value-free." But such teachers may be deceiving themselves as well as their students. For the fact is that no educational process is "value-free." All teachers reveal their values in what they say and do, if only through inflections of voice, gestures or facial expressions. The teacher of philosophical thinking must therefore be aware at all times of the possibility that he is wittingly or unwittingly encouraging children to adopt his own personal set of values. Nor can he escape the fact that children

00009

not unreasonably look up to those whose experience of the world is broader or deeper than their own. His attitudes, whatever they be, are bound to carry considerable wieght with youngsters who are unsure of the signifigance of their own experience.

Students in a classroom engaged in philosophical discussion should feel free to advocate any value position they choose to, without the teacher's having to feel that he must agree or disagree with each and every point. The teacher who constantly interposes his own views runs the risk of creating inhibitions in students which will sooner or later close off the discussion itself. However, when students have reached a point in the development of their critical abilities such that they can deal objectively with the teacher's opinions without feeling coerced by them, and if the students desire to know what the teacher's opinion is, no great harm would likely result from his explaining just what he thinks.

The question that naturally arises at this point concerns the teacher's insistence that participants in philosophical discussions try to be coherent, consistent and comprehensive in their thinking. "Aren't coherence, consistency and comprehensiveness simply replacements for the personal values which the teacher is being asked not to force upon his students?" it will be said. There are two answers to this question.

a. Coherence, consistency and comprehensiveness are values only in the sense that they are standards for effective communication and criteria for effective inquiry. They are appropriate to the *way* a person should think, not to *what* he should think. Therefore, they are procedural rules, not substantive ones.

b. There may well be other forms of activity in which children will find that these rules are hindrances rather than aids. For example, they may find that their play need not be consistent, the chores they do at home need not be comprehensive and their poetic impulses may be stifled if it is demanded that they be more coherent. In other words, coherence, consistency and comprehensiveness are appropriate values for philosophical discussion and scientific inquiry, but not necessarily for other aspects of a person's life which may well include characteristics of spontaneity and randomness to which the aforementioned values are irrelevant.

As for the matter of trust, it must be emphasized that most children are extremely sensitive to the whole spectrum of techniques whereby an adult can condescend to them and humiliate them. A slight or a "put-down" will have a momentary shock but it leaves a scar, and that scar

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means that the trust essential to the learning process has been lost. Some people evoke immediate trust from others. But most of us have to work at it patiently. And there is no infallible recipe as to how one does it.

Basically there are three kinds of situations. Most undesirable, of course, is the classroom in which the students are afraid to "open up" before the teacher because they fear loss of his affection or respect.

A better situation is one in which the students feel free to discuss abstract matters, but are very careful not to say or imply anything which would challenge the values that they believe the teacher to hold.

The optimum situation obviously is one in which the students trust the teacher sufficiently so that they are willing to risk criticism of the teacher's methods or values because they know that the teacher will consider such criticisms from them fairly. A teacher who respects his students and is ready always to learn from them and somehow in his behavior makes this known to his students will find that he has their trust. He will be able to recognize that their sometimes critical comments or mischievous comments are the students' ways of testing him for his reactions. The teacher who, himself, is insecure or defensive and who finds criticism from children intolerable will quickly be spotted by the children as someone whom they are not prepared to trust. This in no way condones student disrespect. However, respect is a two-way street and teachers who do not respect their students, their ideas, needs and interests and who do not manifest this respect in their behaviour are unrealistic if they think their students are going to respect them just because they are teachers.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE COURSE

What can we hope to accomplish by offering children a course in philosophical thinking?

1. *Improvement of Reasoning Ability*

One of the most serious difficulties experienced by elementary school children is in the area of the drawing of inferences. The child may have a problem either with perceptual inferences, logical inferences or evidential inferences.

a. *Perceptual Inferences.* A child may have 20-20 vision and yet have difficulty drawing inferences from what he sees. He may come home to a house where the doors are normally kept locked, find the door open, and it may still not occur to him that something is different.

00011

He perceives adequately but he fails to draw the obvious perceptual inference. His hearing may be perfectly all right, he hears the car horn but he fails to infer that a car is coming. This is not a difficulty limited to children: there are adults who likewise cannot draw perceptual inferences.

b. *Logical Inferences.* Another type of difficulty a child may experience has to do with the drawing of an inference from a statement. For example, if somebody says that "Winters at the equator are never cold," the child should be able to infer that the statement, "Last winter was cold at the equator" is false. A child should know that from the statement, "Some people are tall", it does *not* follow that "All people are tall."

c. *Inferences from Evidence.* Sometimes a person is confronted by a set of facts of various sorts. For example, he visits a foreign country, and he observes parades, children with flags and banners, speeches and singing, and he concludes that "it must be some sort of national holiday." This is an inference drawn from observable evidence.

Children who experience difficulties with any or all of the above-mentioned types of inferences are likely to experience academic difficulties as well. The child may be able to read perfectly well, but can't interpret what he reads because he can't draw inferences from the material. He may do good work in a laboratory when given specific directions but then may be at a loss when asked about the meaning of what he has done: he observes effects but has trouble inferring causes. Or he observes countless instances of the same kind but can't infer that there may be a rule or a law involved.

Such children may be experiencing an "inference block," and this kind of block very likely *cannot* be resolved by repetitious exercises or memorization of rules of thinking. In fact, there is no easy solution to an "inference block." This course in philosophical thinking perhaps can contribute to an alleviation of the problem by helping the child to begin the process of inferring by creating a milieu which encourages him to do so. Hopefully this course will encourage him to draw better inferences, help him to identify evidence, and assist him in recognizing inferences that are faulty. Much can be accomplished if the child can be brought via his own experience to understand the feasibility of going beyond what he sees and reads, and developing the capability for drawing inferences. As long as he is stuck with the concrete perceptions and verbal expressions that surround him on every side, he may feel so "overwhelmed" by it all that he cannot bring himself to get "up and over" all the content and

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facts and begin the *process of thinking*. It is for this reason that teaching which emphasizes content to the exclusion of the process of inquiry is so damaging to the child in the long run.

2. Development of Creativity.

It is an unfortunate part of traditional education that training in logical rigor has been assumed to take place only at the expense of imagination and creativity. As if, for the child's logical proficiency to be developed, his spontaneity and imaginativeness would need to be suppressed. The approach taken in this program supposes on the contrary that logical thinking can be encouraged by means of creative activity, and conversely, that creativity can be fostered with the development of logical ability. The two go hand in hand.

In the manual that follows, we have endeavored to suggest various kinds of creative play activities: games, dramatizations, puppetry, art forms and so on, all of which directly or indirectly contribute to the child's ability to exemplify his concepts and to explore their consequences and meanings.

Adults are too frequently prone to underestimate the heavy penalty which our society places upon the child's free imagination and creativity. The more insecure the child's life is, the more precarious his surroundings, the more of a luxury it is for him to engage in a rich fantasy life, imagining things as they might be, instead of confronting the grim reality of things as they are. The inner-city child, or for that matter, any child who must deal on a day to day basis with the perils of poverty, crime and other aspects of social disorganization, cannot shake off this atmosphere of concrete fact, so as to be able to enjoy the delights of fairy tales, and the imaginary escapades of imaginary children and other imaginary creatures in imaginary environments.

Now in the past we have treated the faulty inferences that have resulted from invalid thinking as just so much intellectual trash. We have failed to recognize that under some circumstances it might actually be beneficial for the child actually to explore the results of invalid reasoning. This is not to deny that many situations call for nothing less than rigorous, logical thinking. But there are many others, in which fantasy and make-believe are appropriate. The usefulness of the logical fallacy in the education of children lies therefore in that it can help compel the child to consider counterfactual situations. It is logically invalid to deduce from the statement, "All onions are vegetables" that "All vegetables are onions." But, if the child is then encouraged to contemplate what a world would be like in which all vegetables would be onions,

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he may very well delight in picturing to himself the details of such a world: one would cry when peeling the carrots, one would smell onions every time one sliced potatoes, etc. Obviously, this does more than liberate the child's imagination; it frees his inventiveness as well.

Helping a child grow means that, at every stage, challenges have to be devised which are appropriate to him at that stage. It is not enough to challenge him to develop his logical ability alone, although such development is certainly necessary. But his growth also depends upon stimulating his inventiveness and creativity. Unless he can imaginatively envisage how things might be, and how he might be, it will be difficult for him to set himself the goals toward which he would like to grow.

3. Personal Development

It is as yet not known what effect this course would have on the child's emotions, interests, inter-personal relational behavior or other aspects of his personal development. What has been evidenced in the pilot projects that have been conducted so far as a difference of spirit in the classroom which could very well be infectious and which could translate itself into a heightened eagerness to learn and share with others, as well as for the development of other aspects of personality. Much testing will have to be performed, however, before it can be confidently asserted that the program can produce a significant increase in self-confidence, emotional maturity and a general self-understanding.

For most children, learning to think philosophically takes place primarily in the process of interpersonal discussion, and in the reflection that follows such a discussion. The child who merely reads the book, *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery,* and is deprived of the opportunity to discuss his interpretations of it with his classmates and his teacher will be deprived of a wealth of meanings which the book is capable of suggesting, but which only a discussion can bring out. Most elementary school textbooks, it is true, are not thought of as vehicles for the promotion of interpersonal communication, but *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery* is a children's book that is to be both read *and* discussed.

The discussion, in turn, brings with it other advantages. In particular, it promotes children's awareness of one another's personalities, interests, values, beliefs and biases. This increased *sensitivity* is one of the most valuable by-products of classroom communication. Unless the child has some insight into the nature of the individuals with whom he shares his life, he is not likely to make sound judgements regarding them. It does no good to teach him moral rules, if he is so insensitive that

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he cannot detect when and how to use them. Unless interpersonal sensitivity is fostered and encouraged as a *prerequisite* for the child's moral development, that moral development will be thwarted. There can be little reason to expect sound moral judgment from the child unless it is preceded by interpersonal insight, and such insight is often the product of successful philosophical dialogue.

However, if it should turn out that these factors are enhanced by the program, it may well be that the program has served not simply to accelerate the child's growth, but *to enlarge his very capacity for* growth. The teacher can make an indispensable contribution to this process. Any living thing goes through a process of growth, but the enlargement of the capacity for growth is something that can only occur under the influence of a caring, concerned and knowledgeable teacher. The capacity for growth will no more enlarge by itself than a ball will roll by itself up an inclined plane. Likewise, a child must be treated in such a way that *his powers begin to reenforce each other,* rather than stabilizing each other and reducing him to a standstill. Under proper educational conditions, this process of reenforcement can generate in the child *a mutually reenforcing set of intellectual and emotional activities* which can pull him well beyond where he would have developed had these factors been developed in isolation from one another.

OTHER OBJECTIVES OF THIS PROGRAM

Other goals of this course in philosophical thinking can be listed as a set of discoveries:

1. Discovering alternatives.
2. Discovering impartiality.
3. Discovering consistency
4. Discovering the feasibility of giving reasons for beliefs.
5. Discovering comprehensiveness.
6. Discovering situations.

1. Discovering alternatives

How do children learn to think of "fresh alternatives?" How do they learn that the way they now think is not the only way they *could* think?

One way they could do so is by developing the habit of always considering the possibility that the *negative* of their idea is or might be correct. The child who sees the sun rise and thinks that "the sun moves around the earth" learns to think that maybe "the sun doesn't move around the earth" - and this may be long before anyone actually tells him that it doesn't. The child who thinks that "the earth is flat," but is at the

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same time critically aware that the negative is possible, will also entertain the thought that "the earth is not flat." Every factual statement has a negative which could possibly be true.

Even more simple and more elementary is taking the idea of something (not a statement but just the thought of some thing or activity) and finding its negative. The negative of "playing" is "not playing." The negative of "laughing" is "not laughing." We can even say that the negative of "chair" is "no chair," or the negative of "table" is "no table."

Now the child who works with these notions will begin to see that when he puts thoughts and their negatives into order, they begin to give him a pattern of alternatives. For example, suppose he thinks of "working," and when he considers the negative, he gets "not working." But "not working" may be interpreted by him as "playing", so now he has two thoughts, "working" and "playing." And now he has four alternatives:

(1) working and playing
(2) working but not playing
(3) playing but not working
(4) neither working nor playing

He may now find that he can apply this set of four alternatives to any pair of ideas whatsoever: milk and fudge, or crocodiles and triangles, or icicles and dandelions, or cards and gasoline. It always works out that there are only four alternatives.

But the child may have been vaguely aware of the alternatives to his thought, yet not fully appreciative of them as possibilities. Chances are, if he's *sick* and *hungry*, that he is dimly aware one can also be *sick but not hungry, hungry but not sick*, or *neither sick nor hungry*. So if you ask him, is there a lot of sickness and hunger in the world today, he will probably say yes. But if you ask him about the other three *possibilities*, he will likely shake his head. A world from which sickness and hunger have been virtually eliminated: *impossible!* Yet a simple demonstration in his own logic would show him that something may be possible, even if it isn't at this moment practical or feasible or likely.

And this is what is meant by learning to discover fresh alternatives. It means considering all the possibilities. Nor do these other possibilities have to be "idealistic", as in the previous example. A child who is aware that he is healthy and well-fed may never really have given much thought to what it would be like to be *well-fed but sick*, or *healthy but hungry*, or *hungry and sick together*. Or, if his family is planning a vacation trip, they may discuss whether to go by bus or train, and he can

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point out that while they can go by either one, they might also go part way by each, or they may choose not to use either mode of transportation, and go in some different fashion, such as by plane. What is important is to give the child practice in examining situations for alternative solutions that might otherwise have been overlooked.

Discovering impartiality

As adults, we certainly are aware that we are often *partial* rather than impartial. We enthusiastically root for the home team, and accuse the umpire or referee of being biased towards the other side. If an accident happens, we generally consider ourselves to have been innocent and the other fellow guilty. And in politics, it is often our view that our candidate can do no wrong, while his opponent is incapable of doing anything right.

Now, there is nothing wrong with such partiality in itself. Why shouldn't one expect a parent to be partial to his own child, or a lawyer to be partial to his client, or a girl to be partial to her boyfriend? Obviously, there are situations that will call for partiality, and in such situations, impartiality might very well be inappropriate.

However, there may be other situations in which partiality is felt to be very definitely wrong. We wouldn't want a judge who shows partiality; we find it difficult to condone the parent who favors one of his own children over the others (or who makes one always the scapegoat); and if someone agrees to mediate a quarrel—whether between individuals or between nations—it just won't do for him to exhibit partiality.

So it's a question of knowing when to be partial and when to be impartial. The trouble is that partiality seems to come easily to most people, while they only learn impartiality the hard way.

Now there is one situation in which impartiality is particularly appropriate. It's the situation in which you're trying to understand something. You begin by trying to understand it solely in terms of your own point of view. You may pay little attention to how other people have experienced the matter. Let's say a friend tells you of a new regulation, and you get pretty worked up about it, because you're certain that it's a stupid rule. And all you want to do at first is tell everyone how you feel. But after you get the matter off your chest, you begin to listen to other people. Some may agree with you, and some may disagree. And you may begin to see that maybe your initial judgement of the new regulation was too hasty. Maybe it has certain merits you didn't at first see. Or maybe it's even worse than you first thought it to be. But in

00017

either case, you've learned from other people's experience. You've learned to see things from their points of view as well as your own. You've begun respecting them for their opinions as much as you respect yourself for your own. And you've begun to rise above your own original, partial estimate of the situation, to be a more objective and impartial judge of the situation.

Now it's just this experience that we have got to make available to children. It's laying too much on them to expect them to be naturally objective and impartial although perhaps some of them are. But they can all learn to be and they'll learn a lot more quickly if we encourage them by arranging situations in which such discussions as the one above take place, in which they can objectively and impartially talk about *their* problems (and not about the ones we'd rather they talk about.)

Perhaps this discovery of the usefulness of impartiality can be illustrated by referring to a situation observed not so long ago in a sixth-grade classroom.

Teacher: Do Lisa and Fran have the same attitude towards Harry Stottlemeier?
A boy: He bothers Lisa, but he doesn't bother Fran.
Teacher: Why does he bother Lisa?
A Girl: Maybe he just doesn't like boys.
Teacher: Why do you say that?
Girl: I dunno. Maybe she thinks boys are always claiming to do better than girls, and she doesn't go along with that.
A boy: Well, they *are* better than girls!
Girl: No, they ain't, neither!
Teacher: What do the rest of you think? Are boys "better" than girls? No, don't all answer at once! One at a time.
Boy: Yeah, boys are better than girls.
Teacher: Do you mean in everything, or just in some things?
Boy: They're better than girls in sports.
Girl: They're better than girls in *some* sports, maybe, but there are sports, like maybe volleyball, where we're better than they are.
Boy: There are plenty of boys better than girls in girl's sports.
Girl: Maybe a few of them are, but in *most* girls'

00018

sports, *most* girls are better than most boys.

Boy: Okay, but in most *boys'* sports, most boys are better than most girls.

Teacher: Are you saying that there are some girls who are better than most boys, even in boys' sports?

Boy: Could be.

Girl: So it isn't true, what you first said, that boys are better than girls!

The conversation moved along after this to other topics, but the point must have been obvious to everyone in the class. They had begun with very sweeping statements, both boys and girls making tremendous generalizations about "all boys" and "all girls". But gradually they had to admit exceptions. And gradually each side began to take a more factual, more objective, more impartial attitude towards the relative strengths of girls and boys. They compared attitudes and opinions, they exchanged biases, but what emerged was a kind of consensus, with each child taking a more unbiased position than that with which he or she began.

3. Discovering consistency

It would be very silly, you'll agree, if someone were to say something like this:

Goliath was very big.
Palestine was not very big.

Therefore, Goliath was bigger than Palestine.

The trouble with the above reasoning is obviously that Goliath was "big" compared with *people*, while Palestine wasn't big when compared with other *countries*. So "big" means something different in each case, with the result that the conclusion is false. The person speaking has used the word "big" *inconsistently*.

Or suppose someone else was silly enough to say this:

No man lives forever.
But women aren't men.

Therefore, women live forever.

Once again, a word is being used *inconsistently*. First the word "men" is used to mean all human beings. Then it's used to mean just male human beings. So it's an invalid, illogical kind of reasoning, and the conclusion does not follow.

00019

Now let's consider a different kind of inconsistency. Suppose someone makes a sweeping statement like, "Everything that goes up must come down." But then he adds, "Of course, we send rockets into outer space, and they don't come back down." He probably isn't aware that his second statement contradicts his first statement. And since his second statement is true, his first statement must be false. So once again we have the problem of a person who takes a position, and then doesn't stick to it. In effect, he too is guilty of *inconsistency*.

Now, cases such as those mentioned above simply represent careless thinking. When we realize we've been thinking in a sloppy sort of way (and inconsistency is an example of mental sloppiness), we may be amused by it, or we may be ashamed of it, or both. But children should no more be encouraged to be inconsistent in their reasoning than they should be encouraged to multiply or subtract incorrectly. Indeed, how would it be if some days, when we added, say, 4 and 5, we got 9, and on other days we got 7 or 16 or 3? Wouldn't that also be clear cases of inconsistency?

Children have to be encouraged to use their words carefully from a very early age. They should be made aware of how the meaning of words in a statement or paragraph can shift their meanings.

If people insist on being inconsistent, the least we can do is challenge them to explain their reasons for doing so. Maybe if they can't find reasons for being inconsistent, they'll come to think of the practice as indefensible, and will prefer being reasonable for a change.

One final example of inconsistency would be the following remarks, paraphrased from a news release by a noted educator:

"Although inflation has produced many serious problems in the area of higher education, there may be a silver lining to the cloud. The higher cost of education will be that many poorer students will not be able to go to college. But the colleges have been looking for some way to get rid of the poorer students anyhow. So maybe it will all work out for the best."

Obviously, there is a shift of meaning here before the first use of the word "poorer" meaning *economically* poorer and the second use of the word "poorer" meaning *academically* poorer. Doubtless, the person who made this statement didn't consciously intend to imply that colleges should be glad to get rid of students who were not financially well-off, but that's what can be inferred from his statement just the same.

4. Discovering the feasibility of giving reasons for beliefs.

Let's say you've been having trouble getting to school on time. Your

00020

alarm clock's been broken and your car's battery has been run down. So now your principal asks you if you expect to be on time for the assembly program first thing tomorrow morning, and you reply, "I believe so."

He surprises you by asking you *why* you think you'll now be on time.

You answer, "Because my clock's been fixed, and I got a new battery for my car, and I can't think of any other reason why I'd be late."

You were challenged to give reasons for your belief, and you did.

Ordinarily, of course, no one challenges you to offer reasons for your beliefs.

But sometimes it just happens that you can't help realizing that some belief of yours has just collapsed. Suppose that, tomorrow morning, fully believing that at last you're going to get to school on time, you're about to leave for work in your car, and discover you've got a flat tire. What happens to your belief that you're going to be on time? You can't continue to believe it, because there's no other means of transportation available. In other words, you've now got *no reason* to believe that you will be to work on time, so you can't continue to believe it. You may *hope*, of course, that just by chance someone will come along and give you a ride - but you have *no reason* to believe that anyone actually will.

So the point is that you might as well believe whatever you want to believe, so long as no one challenges you to give reasons for your beliefs, and as long as the facts as you know them don't contradict your beliefs.

All of your actions, and all of your thoughts, are hinged upon your beliefs. You go to school each day in the belief that it's still there; you go home each day in the belief that *it's* still there. You wouldn't do any of the things you now do out of habit if you didn't believe things to be the way they are.

But this is all the more reason for your beliefs to be as sound as possible. And the way to check upon their soundness is to be able to provide reasons or evidence for them. Your beliefs are the foundation of your whole outlook on life and of the way you live. Who would want the foundation of his beliefs to be shaky?

Think of it this way. If you were going to buy a house, you would certainly want to check around in the basement. It could be a very nice house, but rest on a very weak foundation, with water seeping everywhere and bricks crumbling away. Well, the same is true of your intellectual domicile: you want it to rest on solid foundations—and it can do so only if your belief-system is sound.

00021

This is why it is helpful for children to challenge each other's ideas. Partly it's done out of playfulness; partly it's done out of competitiveness or contentiousness. (As with any game, there's always the possibility that it might get too rough for the individuals involved.) But it's a kind of dialogue that can be extremely beneficial, not just to the person asking the questions, but to the one thinking up the answers (that is, the person who is being challenged to provide reasons for believing as he does.) And it is helpful to all the others who listen in and take note of what is going on: it will cause them to think a little more about why *they* believe as they do. (Always remember that, while the children who do most of the talking are invoking *their* right to express themselves, the children who sit by listening intently are thereby expressing *their* right to *hear* what is going on. And if you violate the right of the speaker by silencing *him*, you equally violate the rights of the listeners to hear wha he had to say. But, of course, you alone, as the teacher, are the judge of what is *relevant* to the class discussion and what is not. You should not hesitate to terminate a speaker who insists upon talking about some irrelevant topics.) To conclude:

1. It is a good thing to know your beliefs are sound and reliable, because you've got to act on them every day. If something goes wrong, you'd better check out your beliefs.
2. In a discussion, your beliefs may be challenged. You'll be asked to provide reasons for them.

Thanks to previous discussions, you may be prepared to meet such requests.

3. You may have good reasons for a particular belief, but they still may not be sufficient to justify your believing in that particular way. It's difficult to say just when reasons become numerous enough to be sufficient, but obviously, the more of them you can find, the better.

Discovering comprehensiveness

It's not enough for a person to have sound ideas on this subject and on that subject, a belief about this and a conviction about that, because all these little bits and pieces may not *add up* to anything. People want an organized set of beliefs and ideas for themselves, a body of thoughts and values that somehow are related and can be counted on in their future actions.

00022

So young people have to be encouraged not merely to love and respect ideas, and not merely to want their ideas to be sound and reasonable. They have to be encouraged to see the connections *among* ideas as well—to see how ideas relate to one another, and converge upon one another and support one another. It's only in that way that a person can begin to build a network of thoughts that he will find permanently serviceable and useful.

As a teacher, you can be particularly helpful here. You have the experience of the world which children generally lack; you know a good deal about how things that go on in the world are related to one another. So you can guide children in this fashion by asking them if they can see the *connection* between certain ideas (where you believe you see a connection and they do not,) and help them to relate their ideas to things that happen in their lives and to the world in which they live. You can help them, when they seem to be groping, by suggesting connections and possible implications or consequences of their ideas. You can attempt to put their thoughts into some kind of context which will make their thoughts more meaningful to them, for the more comprehensive the setting of an idea is, the richer will that idea be in meaning.

For example, you will notice that children are intensely conscious of each episode in the book as it occurs, but the very intensity of that awareness may block out their recollections of earlier incidents in the book. As a teacher, you can through questioning encourage them to see the *connections* between what went before and what came after. There is perhaps no better training that a child can have for the development of an adequate conception of himself than to relate his present and his past and his future so as to see them as one continuous life.

As adults, we should try to be aware of how differently adults and children experience the world. A child usually feels the impact of a situation in its entirety; he experiences it as joyous, or miserable, as friendly or hostile, as threatening, or as inviting. But he generally does not analyze it very much. Adults, on the other hand, have learned the relationships and connections that exist among things, so they are able to perceive things as isolated; they already know the connections.

The adult, therefore, thinks that the child should perceive the way the adult does by focusing on separate details until, part by part, he has been able to put the situation together. What the child needs to be able to do is to explore it, discover what parts it contains, disentangle them from one another and understand their *connections* to one another. An

00023

adult who stresses beginning with the parts and ultimately arriving at the whole therefore runs directly contrary to the child's inclination to begin with the whole and subsequently discern its component parts.

In other words, the child has a natural inclination to be speculative rather than intellectually timid. You as teacher cannot do better than to build upon this natural sense of wholeness which the child demands, while at the same time helping him discover how it is put together.

3. Discovering situations

Much is heard these days about teaching children to make decisions, for it is assumed, at least in some quarters, that children ought to be decisive, the way police captains and quarterbacks and business executives are decisive. Now, there is no doubt that in a situation which calls for a choice to be made, the child should be able to make that choice as intelligently as possible. Surely if he has the opportunity to choose—among different types of play, or different books to read, or different things to explore—and doesn't do so, then he is not taking full advantage of his freedom.

On the other hand, if he is pressed to be decisive in situations where it would be better to wait to see how things develop, or until more facts are at hand, then he can very well end up by doing more harm than good by his premature decisiveness. Very often, the child is presented with illustrative situations that are so skeletal or schematic, so lacking in specifics, that it would be very difficult for anyone to make a reasonable decision on the basis of the few facts presented. Yet, it is alleged that the child is given practice in decision-making by being pressed to make up his mind as to what he would do in such artificial situations. As a matter of fact, history is filled with instances of tragic blunders committed by people who believed it necessary to be decisive, but who had little feeling for or grasp of the situations upon which they imposed their decisions.

To exaggerate the importance of a decision is therefore to exaggerate the product while neglecting the process. The child must be helped to grasp a situation in which the decision is required, and to read the character of that situation correctly. If he has done so, the choice he has to make may be easier due to his understanding of the situation's structure and requirements.

This course in philosophical thinking at times presents children with examples of moral situations. For instance, there is Dale's problem as to whether or not to salute the flag, or there is Anne's treating her friend Suki as if she were an interesting object to bring home to her parents.

00024

Or Bill Beck's throwing a stone at Harry. Or Lisa's accusing Mickey of stealing the briefcase, simply on the basis of a hunch. But it is not demanded of the children who read these problem situations that they say what they would do if they were the characters in the book. Rather, they are free to discuss, analyze, interpret and explore the complexities of these moral dilemmas. In this fashion the children in the classroom can become more sensitive to the subtleties and nuances of the situations which they encounter in the book. And in the process, they hopefully will become more acutely aware of the moral character of situations which they encounter in their daily lives.

Philosophy is not a self-help course in decision-making. In fact, it might even make decisions a little harder to make, in some cases, by *widening* the range of alternatives from which to choose, rather than by narrowing it down always to a decision between one course of action and another.

Unless proper and adequate means for decision-making have already been developed in the child, forcing a decision upon him, even an artificial or idealized one, is only going to be experienced by him as frustrating and perhaps even humiliating. We do not increase a child's self-esteem when we force him into situations he is not prepared for: we just lower it immeasurably.

And what are the *means* for decision-making which must first be developed in the child? They are such things as respect for one another's point of view, the ability to identify sympathetically with another person's perspective, the capacity to reason consistently, the capacity to imagine alternative possibilities, sensitivity to the variety of tiny but important factors which go to make up an interpersonal situation, and a feeling for the uniqueness of that particular situation and what would be right for *it*, even though roughly similar situations might have been treated differently in the past. Unless the child's development in these areas is carefully fostered and encouraged, he will find decision-making situations threatening and traumatic. He may even use every possible device to avoid such situations.

Some devices that might prove very helpful would be to let the children act out (perhaps in pantomime, so as to give it the zany quality of a silent film) situations such as these: a woman with a lot of wild children getting on a crowded bus with an irritable bus driver; or an overworked pair of counter attendants at McDonalds trying to handle a hungry bunch of vacationing school children; or a crowd's reactions to a tight-rope walker with an itch; or the family life of a teacher trying to

00025

grade papers at home while her own children tear up the house, watch television, grumble about doing the dishes, etc. There are countless such situations that can be improvised; what is important is for the children to identify with them and even to act them out without stressing the imperative that they make decisions: *Let the decision arrive, if it must, by flowing naturally and without fuss or self-consciousness out of the situation.* In short, it would be well to stop making a big thing about decisions, and concentrate instead on preparing children for life situations by encouraging them to participate in imaginary ones where the emphasis is on getting them to appreciate and enjoy the quality of the situation, rather than on the choices that may *or may not* have to be made within that situation.

The child who has developed the capacity for sizing up situations, having an insight into their character, having imagination as to what can possibly be done to improve their unsatisfactory aspects, and having the courage to act on alternatives that seem to him most reasonable and plausible does not need a course in value-clarification or in decision-making, for he is already a morally responsible individual.

00026